BULI RAMAIAH): (a) and (b) Export promotion is a continuous and sustained process and steps are continuously being taken by the Government to promote exprots through policy and promotional measures. The export growth rate during 1995-96 was 20.8% and satisfactory. Only during 1996-97 the rate of growth was 4.1% which was below the target. This was due to many factors international as well as domestic. The new Exim Policy 1997-2002 has been formulated with a view to carrying forward the process of dismantling and rationalising regulatory policies which hindered promotion of exports. Efforts are being made to simplify/ reduce procedures and to create a hastle free environment for the exprting community. Based on interaction with trade and industry, steps are being taken to improve export growth.

(c) and (d) As a part of export promotion strategy, it has been decided to set up an Export Promotion Board under the Chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary to address inter-ministerial issues and resolve the same. This effort is expected to remove the irritants to exports and to put exports on a high growth path. Regular meetings are being held with various export promotion councils, commodity boards, trade and industry to evolve measures to achieve a high growth for exports. A medium term strategy is being drawn up based on analysis of data and interaction with trade and industry.

Import of Rice

669. DR. MOHAN BABU : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to import rice as reported in the 'Hindustan Times' dated 30.5.97;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) remedial steps taken to boost production of rice?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BAULI RAMAIAH) : (a) and (b) Import of common/coarse varieties of rice and rice with 50% or more broken has been permitted freely after review of the emerging trends in supply and stock of rice by the Government with effect from 27.5.97.

(c) Some of the measures taken to increase production and productivity of rice are the implementation of the following Centrally Sponsored/Central Sector schemes:—

(1) Integrated Cereals Development Programme in Rice Based Cropping System Areas (ICDP-Rice)-assistance is being provided to the farmers for the use of certified seeds of high yielding varities and improved farm implements including sprinkler sets and power tillers. Besides, assistance is also provided for encouraging the use of green manure and soil ameliorants.

(2) Central Sector Rice Seed Minikit Programme including propagation of improved crop production technology—seed minikits of Rice are provided to the farmers at nominal cost for propagation of new varities with biotic and abiotic resistance and also for organising trainings by the Agricultural Universities/ICAR Reasearch Institutions to the State/District Level Agriculture Officers for dissemination of improved crop production technology.

Setting up of High Powered Export Promotion Board to promote Exports

670. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether country's export performance during the past few months have fallen considerably;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the Prime Minister has ordered setting up of a High Powered Export Promotion Board to resolve Inter-Ministerial problems related to export sector;

(d) if so, the details of problems faced by exporters; and

(e) to what extent the recent steps of Government will boost export performance?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA